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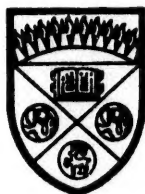
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THE
DOUKHOBORTSI
AND
Religious Persecution
IN
RUSSIA

A LECTURE DELIVERED
IN 4 mo. 1900, AT THE
FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, MOUNT ST.,
MANCHESTER

BY
John Ashworth
(206 Upper Brook Street, Manchester)

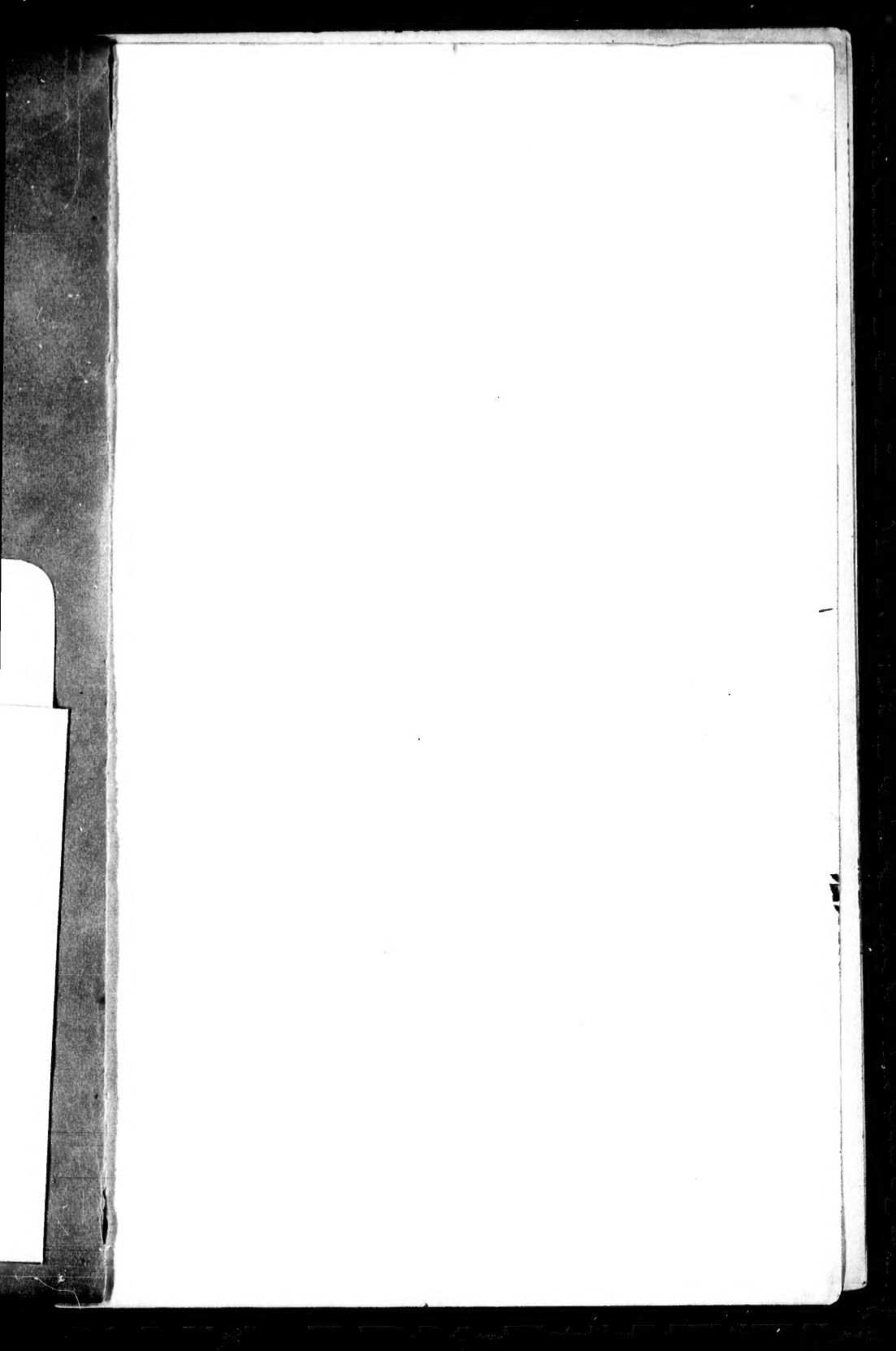


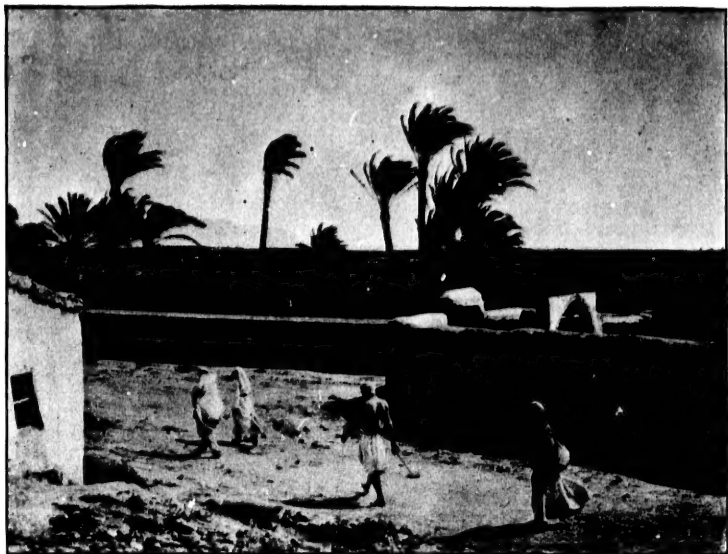
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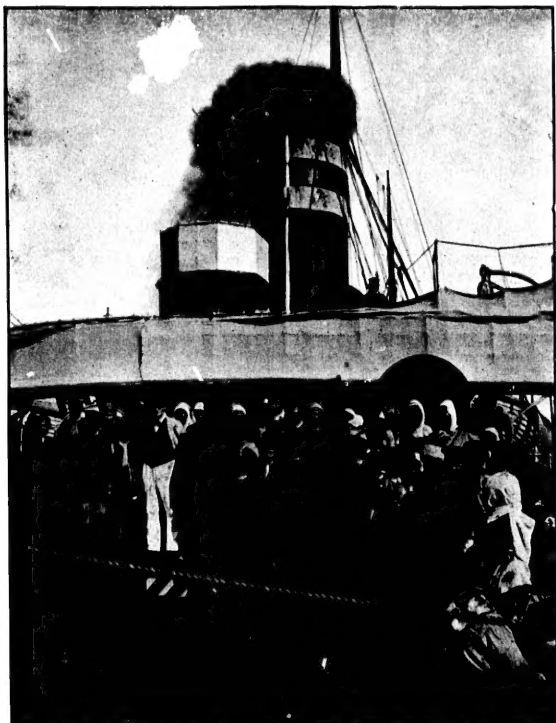
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ATHALASSA FARM, NEAR NICOSIA, CYPRUS

(One of three farms temporarily occupied by Doukhobors in 1898-1899)



DOUKHOBOR EMIGRANTS: CYPRUS TO CANADA, 1899

THE DOUKHOBORTSI

AND

Religious Persecution in Russia

A LECTURE BY

JOHN ASHWORTH

In bringing this subject into notice I am anxious to awaken an interest on behalf of the unsectarian churches in the vast country of Russia, more especially of the Doukhobortsi, who are suffering in various ways for not worshipping after the manner of the State Religion, known as the Greek Church.

For many of the particulars in this Lecture I am indebted to Vladimir Tchertkoff and Lally Bernard, and to W. Bellows for photographs.

The history of the Doukhobors brings home to members of the Society of Friends what our forefathers suffered in the days of George Fox, in the time of the Irish rebellion, and during the American War.

The religious communities that have suffered and are suffering persecution at the hands of the Government, are principally the Baptists, Stundists, Molokins, and Doukhobortsi.

The Baptists, only a few years ago, were permitted to have full freedom for worship in their own places, but this freedom is now restricted to the Province of Livonia, Riga being their chief centre. It is only within this district that they are permitted to erect Meeting Houses. Some of their Pastors are undergoing imprisonment for converting members of the Greek Church to their doctrines; they are forbidden to have schools of their own, and are obliged to send their children to the Orthodox schools.

The Stundists hold similar views to the Baptists. They are not allowed to have their own churches, and they are liable to imprisonment if three of them assemble for worship; they therefore attach themselves to the Baptists that they may take part in their services. Both these are allowed the Bible and hymn books, but they are not permitted to read or receive any religious literature.

The Molokins are Methodists, and they do not believe in war, and they also are not allowed to have any books. These people are scattered in families in different parts of Russia but mostly in the Caucasus, in order to prevent them from meeting together, yet in spite of these precautions their principles spread.

Lastly, the Doukhoborts or "Spirit-Wrestlers." These people were first heard of about 150 years ago, and at the end of the last century or the beginning of the present their doctrines had become so clearly defined, and the number of their followers had so greatly increased, that the Government and the Greek Church considered their creed to be peculiarly obnoxious. They therefore subjected them to cruel persecution.

The foundation of the Spirit-Wrestlers' teaching consists in the belief that the Spirit of God is present in the soul of man, and directs him by its word within him.

They understand the coming of Christ in the flesh, His works, teaching, and sufferings, in a spiritual sense. The

object of the sufferings of Christ, in their view, was to give us an example of suffering for truth. Christ continues to suffer in them even now, when they do not live in accordance with the behests and spirit of His teaching. The whole teaching of the Spirit-Wrestlers is penetrated with the gospel spirit of love.

Worshipping God in the spirit, the Spirit-Wrestlers affirm that the outward Church and all that is performed in it and concerns it has no importance for them. The Church is where two or three are gathered together, *i.e.* united in the name of Christ.

They pray inwardly at all times; while, on fixed days (corresponding for convenience to the orthodox holy-days,) they assemble for prayer-meetings, at which they read prayers and sing hymns, or psalms as they call them, and greet each other fraternally with low bows, thereby acknowledging every man as a bearer of the Divine Spirit.

The teaching of the Spirit-Wrestlers is founded on tradition. This tradition is called among them the "Book of Life," because it lives in their memory and hearts. It consists of psalms, partly formed out of the contents of the Old and New Testaments, partly composed independently.

The Spirit-Wrestlers found their mutual relations and their relations to other people — and not only to people, but to all living creatures — exclusively on love; and, therefore, they hold all people equal, brethren. They extend this idea of equality also to the Government authorities; obedience to whom they do not consider binding upon them in those cases where the demands of these authorities are in conflict with their conscience, while in all that does not infringe what they regard as the will of God, they willingly fulfil the desires of the authorities.

They consider murder, violence, and in general all relations to living beings not based on love, as opposed to their conscience, and to the will of God.

Such are the beliefs for which the Spirit-Wrestlers have long endured such persecutions.

Yet it may be said of them that they are industrious and abstemious, always truthful in their speech, for they account all lying as a great sin.

The Emperor Alexander I., on the 9th. December, 1816, expressed himself in one of his rescripts, as follows :—

“ All the measures of severity exhausted upon the Spirit-Wrestlers during the 30 years up to 1801, not only did not destroy that sect, but more and more multiplied the number of its adherents.”

His Majesty, wishing to isolate them, graciously allowed them to emigrate from the Provinces of Tamboff and Ekaterinoslav (where they flourished and enjoyed religious liberty) to the so-called Milky Waters in the Taurid Province.

In the reign of Nicholas I, severe persecution befell them, especially for not bearing arms. Between 1840 and 1850 they were transported to the extreme borders of the Caucasus, where being always confronted with hillsmen, it was thought they must of necessity protect their property and families by force of arms, and would thus have to renounce their convictions. Moreover, the so-called Wet Hills, appointed for their settlement, had a severe climate, standing, as they did, 5,000 feet above the sea level. Barley grew with difficulty, and crops were often destroyed by frost.

Others of these Spirit-Wrestlers were transported to the wild, unhealthy and uncultivated district of Elizavetpol, where it was thought the wild frontier tribes would probably exterminate them. Instead of that, they won the friendship of the hill tribes, and enjoyed half a century of prosperity and peace, although in the first instance they suffered to some extent through the depredations of the inhabitants, because they carried out their principles of non-resistance.

In 1887, when Universal Military Conscription was introduced into the Trans-Caucasus, many of the Spirit-Wrestlers, through the snare which comes with increase of worldly goods, became lax in their religious views and joined the army. This indifference continued until 1895, when Peter Verigin, whom the Doukhobors now look up to as their leader, was the means of creating a revival amongst them, and bringing them back to the faith of their fathers, and to their old custom of vegetarianism and total abstinence from all intoxicants and tobacco. They voluntarily divided their property, in order to do away with the distinctions between rich and poor, and again they strictly insisted on the doctrine of non-resistance to violence.

The Russian Government felt that Peter Verigin would be better removed, especially as the conscription was again being introduced into the Caucasus. He was banished to Lapland, but afterwards transferred to Obdorsk, in Siberia, in order that he might be more completely cut off from his people.

In carrying out this spirit of non-resistance, however, they felt that so long as anyone possessed arms, it was difficult to keep from using them, when robbers came to steal a horse or a cow. So to remove temptation and to give proof of their principles to the Government, they resolved to destroy their arms. This decision was unitedly carried out in the three districts on the night of June 28th, 1895. In the Kars district all passed off quietly. In the Elizavetpol district, the authorities made it an excuse for arresting 40 of them under a plea that it was a rebellion against army service. The people in the villages of Goreloe in the Tiflis district fared still worse. There a large assembly of men and women gathered at night for the purpose of burning their arms; they continued singing psalms till the bonfire had burned low, and the day had begun to dawn. Just then two regiments of Cossacks arrived on the scene, and were ordered to charge

upon the defenceless crowd, without even ascertaining the cause of the gathering. They flogged the men and women with heavy whips, until the Doukhobors' faces were cut and their clothes covered with blood.

No one was tried for this, and no one was punished, nor has any explanation or apology been offered to them. The Government in St. Petersburg depend for information upon the local authorities, who were the very people who sanctioned this crime. The newspapers dare not report such disgraceful scenes, in fact they are forbidden to do so.

Vladimir Tchertkoff, Paul Birukoff, and Ivan Tregouboff went to St. Petersburg to plead before the Emperor on behalf of these suffering people. Instead of seeing him they were banished without trial and without being allowed to make the matter public.

Instead of the perpetrators of these crimes being punished, Cossacks were quartered in the villages of the Doukhobors, and there insulted the women, beat the men, and stole their property. Four thousand were obliged to abandon their houses and sell their well cultivated lands at a few days' notice, and were banished to unhealthy districts where nearly 1,000 perished in the next three years, from want, disease and ill-treatment.

It may be interesting at this juncture to shew, from the following discourse between a Judge and one of the Doukhobors, that some of the authorities had a tender place in their hearts.

To the conscription of the year 1895, in the district town of Dushet, there were summoned seven of the Spirit-Wrestlers who were exiled to the Gory district. They were all entitled to exemption owing to domestic circumstances. They obeyed the summons, but declined to draw lots, and the village alderman was told to draw for them. A report was drawn up of their refusal, and they were sent home

again. The judge determined that they were to appear before the Court on the 14th of November, and served them with notices to do so on the spot.

"They appeared at the Court at 9 a. m. The judge said, 'Are you the men who refused to draw lots?'

"'We are.'

"'And why do you refuse?'

"Glagolieff: 'Because we do not wish to enter the military service, knowing beforehand that such service is against our conscience, and we prefer to live according to our conscience, and not in opposition to it. Although by the military law we are entitled to exemption, we would not draw lots because we did not wish to have any share in a business which is contrary to the will of God and to our conscience.'

"The Judge: 'The term of service is now short: you can soon get it over and go home again. Then they will not drag you from court to court, and from prison to prison.'

"Glagolieff: 'Mr. Judge, we do not value our bodies. The only thing of importance to us is that our conscience should be clear. We cannot act contrary to the will of God. And it is no light matter to be a soldier, and to kill a man directly you are told. God has once for all impressed on the heart of each man, "Thou shalt not kill." A Christian will not only not learn how to kill, but will never allow one of God's creatures to be beaten.'

"Then said the judge, 'But nevertheless, we cannot do without soldiers and war, because both you and others have a little property, and some people are quite rich; and if we had no armies and no soldiers, then evil men and thieves would come, and would plunder us, and with no army we could not defend ourselves.'

"Then Glagolieff replied, 'You know, Mr. Judge, that it is written in the Gospels, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." We have obeyed this injunction, and will hold to it, and therefore shall have no need of defending anything.'

Why, ask yourself, Mr. Judge, how we can keep our money when our brothers need it? We are commanded to help our neighbours, so that we cannot find rest in our souls when we see them in want. Christ when He was on earth taught that we should "feed the hungry, give shoes to those who have none, and share with those who are needy."

"Then the judge began to enquire into our circumstances, and asked how we were getting on, and how the country suited us, all about the distraint, and the Cossacks striking the women and old men, and their outraging the young women, and expressed great astonishment that soldiers, whose duty it was to protect us, could turn themselves into brigands and murderers.

"Then said Glagolieff, 'We see from this, Mr. Judge, that an army does not in the least exist for the protection of our own interests, but in order that our savings may be spent on armaments, and is no use in the world but to cause misery, outrage, and murder.'

"Then the judge, who had listened to it all attentively, was greatly moved and distressed by all the cruelties which had been practised on the Spirit-Wrestlers. He condemned them, in virtue of some section or other of the Code, to a fine of three roubles, and himself advised them not to pay it.

"He talked a great deal more to us, and questioned us, and said, as he dismissed us, 'Hold fast to that commandment of the Lord's.'

"We went to the inn to dine, and see our friends, and before we had any dinner, the judge came to see us, and brought us two roubles, in case we had nothing to eat. We endeavoured to decline the money, saying, 'We do not want it. Thank God, to-day we shall have enough.' But he begged us to accept it as the offering of a pure heart, and made in sincerity, and then we took it, as from a brother, and after thanking him, and bidding him farewell, went away. He

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DOUKHOBORS FROM CYPRUS ON BOARD S.S. "LAKE SUPERIOR"
(Ascending the St. Lawrence River to Quebec, 5 mo., 1899)



IN VILLAGE AT SOUTH DOUKHOBOR COLONY, NR. YORKTON, ASSINIBOIA
(Houses built of poplar beams : roofs of turf. The building to the right is a bake-house.)

showed us where he lived, expressed a wish to know more of us, and begged us to come and talk with him."

Ultimately, the Russian Government, perhaps realising that persecution would not turn the Doukhobors from their faith, granted them permission to emigrate. They were assisted in this emigration by the Friends in England. One colony was sent to Cyprus, where the climate proved unsuitable. Finally arrangements were made with the Canadian Government for each male over 18 years of age to have a grant of 160 acres of land in Manitoba, together with a loan of one dollar per head.

In the first half of 1899, over 6,000 emigrated to Manitoba, Assiniboia and Saskatchewan — and in the Spring it was found necessary to transport the Cyprus Colony to Canada also, as many of them were suffering from fever — this bringing up the total number of Doukhobors in Canada to about 7,400.

The Russian Government apparently showed great forethought in the manner in which they carried out the persecution, by arresting the leaders and foremost men and banishing them to Siberia. At the present time 110 have been thus cruelly snatched away from their families and people, and are still in exile.

In the Autumn of last year I had occasion to visit Canada on business, when, through the kindness of the Deputy Minister of the Interior, whom I met at Ottawa, arrangements were made for my paying a visit to some of the Doukhobor Settlements. Upon arriving at Winnipeg, Mr. McCreary, the Immigration Commissioner, passed me forward to Mr. Crerar, the Government Agent at Yorkton, who provided me with a two-horse rig, and an interpreter by the name of Captain Arthur St. John, a retired military officer, and who had become a follower of Tolstoi.

Yorkton is a town of about 600 inhabitants, at the terminus of the branch line, which is 270 miles North-west of



UPERIOR"



N, ASSINIBOIA
(is a bake-house.)

Winnipeg. It takes from 8.30 in the morning to about 10 o'clock at night to cover this distance.

On my journey between Winnipeg and Yorkton I got into conversation with a contractor who was on his way to the latter place to engage 500 Doukhobors to work on the railway at \$1.75 per day. He spoke well of them and thought them steady workmen. At the same time he stated that many objections were raised against foreigners being brought into the district.

On the bright, frosty morning of the 25th. of October, accompanied by Arthur St. John, I drove 15 miles over the prairie to Whitesand. There we stayed the night with a Friend of the name of Alfred Hutchinson, an Ackworth scholar, formerly of Wellingborough, England. At an early hour in the morning, we crossed Whitesand River, drove over the prairie and along the south east side of Good Spirit or Devil's Lake, till we reached the South Colony of Doukhobors. We stopped to exchange salutations at the first two villages. I shall always remember my first impression of a Doukhobor village on that beautiful, frosty morning. A picturesque group of quaintly built chalet-like houses, made of logs with turf roofs. The sides were coated with clay plaster and presented a uniform appearance. In the centre of the main room was a large oven, 5 feet square, which served the purpose of heating the hut and cooking the food. Everything showed most careful workmanship. The habits of personal cleanliness, acquired in their old country, were continued here, for it was noticeable that one of the first buildings put up was a Russian bath.

We were sorry to hear that these villagers were obliged to remove in the Spring, owing to their having planted themselves too near former settlers, and also because the land was not good enough to produce sufficient food for the needs of so many.

We next visited the villages on Paterson Lake, where the people seemed more contented and comfortable. They expressed their gratitude for what Friends had done in bringing them to Canada. After the usual salutations, we drove about two miles north to a ranche run by some Scotch people, Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan, who made us welcome for the night. A surveying camp was near, and the leader came and spent two hours with us. Although we were right on the prairie, thirty miles away from any town, yet so many people were gathered together that quite a pleasant evening was spent. Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan spoke highly of the Doukhobors for their honesty and faithfulness. A Doukhobor worked on their farm and they sent him the following day with his team to help the Surveyors to change their camp to twenty miles off. The women are very clever with the needle, as specimens of their handiwork showed.

After a pleasant evening, a good night's rest, and farewell greetings, we continued our journey over the prairie to the next villages. At one time, owing to a frosty mist, we lost our trail in trying to make a short cut. Fortunately, we came across some lumber men at a stream, who put us on the track, and soon we struck Williams' ranche. Here we stopped for refreshment and to rest our horses. These farmers had also a Doukhobor working for them. Mrs. Williams told us she could trust the Doukhobors when left with herself and children, while she did not feel nearly so safe with the untrustworthy Galician settlers. As evening was approaching, we hastened to the next village, and arrived as the sun was setting.

Here we spent the night in a Doukhobor hut. I had a long conversation with the leaders in the village, through Arthur St. John. They chanted some of their psalms to us, after which we had supper of dark brown, sour bread, tea in glasses, potatoes sliced and baked in oil, which we ate

according to their custom with our fingers ; then a kind of soup made of macaroni, for which they provided home-made wooden spoons.

Arthur St. John, on leaving me that night, instructed a Doukhobor to accompany me on the morrow. He then walked through the night, 18 miles over the prairie to the next village.

Before retiring for the night, I endeavoured to amuse the girls and boys by teaching them simple English words, and I was well repaid by their quickness in learning. After a comfortable night's rest and a breakfast similar to the supper aforesaid — several Doukhobors escorted me some distance in the beautiful morning. We drove 18 miles over the prairie to the next village, which after some difficulty we reached about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Here we had another Russian meal, and after a friendly greeting drove to the last village on my tour. I found many poor people here, suffering more or less from the Cyprus fever.

Arthur St. John walked back to the village I had just left, whilst I drove across Dead Horse Creek to Kamsack Post Office, where I put up for the night in such accommodation as could be had. We slept in a loft; I on an old-fashioned bed, the driver in rugs on the floor and the Doukhobor boy on the kitchen floor.

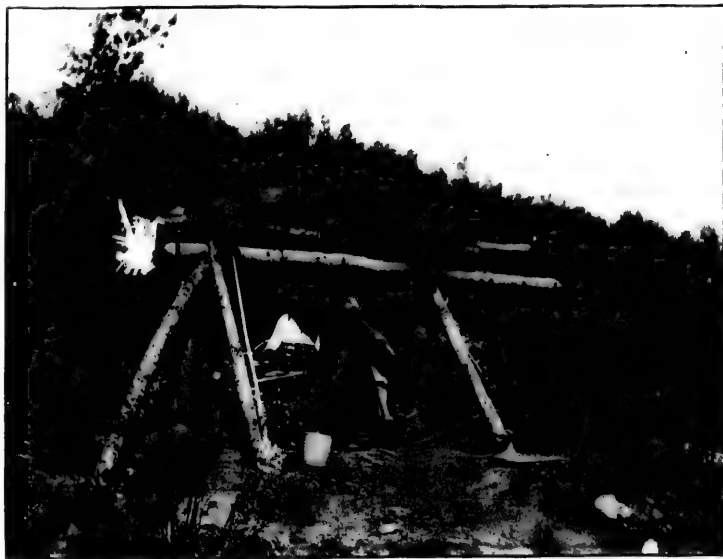
The next day we drove back to Yorkton, a distance of 40 miles, arriving there about 10 o'clock at night. The last eight miles over the prairie was by brilliant starlight.

It is difficult to state clearly what the Doukhobor belief is, especially when we bear in mind that these people are what we should call illiterate. They have no written history, and what knowledge they have is handed down orally from father to son. Upon entering a meeting the custom is for the men to greet each other by bowing three times and kissing one another, and the women do the same to each other. At the commencement, each one says a prayer. The three bows



DOUKHOBOR WOMEN DRAGGING PLOUGH: SPRING, 1899

(South Colony—45 miles from Yorkton. Most of the men absent, working on the Railway)



DOUKHOBOR BAKE-OVEN AT NORTH COLONY, ASSINIBOIA, CANADA

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and kisses are intended to signify the cleansing of the body and the repulsion of pride ; they take each other's hands as a sign of union and love, kindly expression, good understanding, and the sense of a God revered in their souls.

During the meetings, one after another recites the prayers he knows ; they sing psalms together and explain to each other the Word of God. As almost all are illiterate, and therefore without books, all this is done from memory. They have no priests in the ordinary sense of the word ; they acknowledge as priest the one just, holy, true Christ, uplifted above sinners higher than the heavens ; He is their sole teacher. Thus at their meetings they hear the Word of God from each other ; each one may express what he knows or feels for the benefit of his brethren ; the women are not excluded from this, for, as they say, women also have understanding, and light is in understanding. They pray either standing or sitting, as the case may be.

At the end of the meeting, they again kiss each other thrice as at the beginning, and then the brethren return home.

In visiting the villages of the Doukhobors one cannot help noticing that "the power that Christianity in its truest sense has of civilising, in our acceptance of the word, is made manifest in this instance. These people, deprived of even the few necessities of life common to the children of the soil, hunted from pillar to post, made to herd like the beasts of the field, beaten, ill-treated, mothers separated from their children and wives from their husbands, are to-day the most polite, orderly people it is possible to imagine. The villages they are building testify to the powers of organisation and inherent orderliness of the people ; the results of self-discipline are apparent in the people as a unit, and the very core of their religious convictions is self-restraint.

"The absence of anything like noisiness or excitability strikes one the instant one moves about among the villages. The very children are curiously quiet and gentle in their mode

of play, and they are miniatures of their elders in more than their picturesque costume. The quiet dignity noticeable comes from the best possible influence, the parents having apparently little trouble in training their children, other than by the example of their own quiet and industrious lives. There is something unutterably pathetic to those who live in this wrangling, noisy world of the nineteenth century to see the women and children of the Doukhoborts quietly and silently bearing with a great patience the load that is laid upon their shoulders. The innate dignity of the women and their uncomplaining, untiring patience have perhaps been the reason that they have had strength given them to endure to the end trials that their magnificent physique could not alone have enabled them to withstand. They are a great people — that is undeniable; and while they are the children of the soil, they are the aristocracy of the soil, people who, to use Ruskin's words, have found that 'all true art is sacred, and in all hand labour there is something divine-ness.' Their hand labour is marvellous, from the finest embroidery to the building and plastering of their houses."

Whatever we may think about the religion of the Doukhobors, we have here at the end of the nineteenth century an object lesson of what these people have suffered for conscience sake in endeavouring according to their light to advance the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth.

Well may we ask ourselves the question, "What would we do under similar circumstances?" Should we also stand true to the dictates of Christ our Master? It might be said in reply, "There is no fear of such a state of things happening in this country." Let us pause and consider. The times are ominous. Militarism is apparently becoming rampant. Even professing representatives of the Gospel of Christ have declared a man to be a coward who attempted to carry out the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. God forbid that His people should forsake Him in their hour of trial.

In conclusion, the following lines, sent me by a Toronto lady who is interesting herself on behalf of the Doukhobors, will express the feelings of those most nearly concerned more eloquently than any words of my own:—

PAX DOMINE!

O Christ, Who calmed the storm that swept
The Waters wild whilst others slept,
Stretch out Thy hand and still the rage
Of battle's lust, and bloody wage.
Else Pagan hordes will cry aloud,
"These be the men of Christ avowed,
These be the brothers claiming high
That Christ, their Prince of Peace is nigh."
"The Prince of Peace!" some cruel jest
Is this that reigns within their breast?
Æons of progress cannot still
Man's savage hate and lawless will.
Dear Christ, stretch forth Thy hand again,
Showing Thou hast not died in vain,
Making Thy words true living things,
Bearing a balm on outspread wings,
And all the world with healing fill,
Proclaim Thy power with "Peace: be still."

